

The President's Medicare prescription drug proposal is a cruel hoax on America's seniors. This empty promise without substantive funding is just cheap rhetoric; a political ploy to make the President look like he cares about seniors and their health. Underneath his nice words, however, there is little substance.

In his speech the President states his priorities, but when you look at the numbers, Medicare isn't one of them. The President wants to commit \$40-\$50 billion per year to eliminate the estate tax and annually help about 1,000 of our nation's wealthiest citizens. In contrast, he dedicates a mere \$7 billion per year to provide a drug benefit for, at most, 3 million of the 40 million Medicare beneficiaries. More appalling, he is paying for the estate tax-cut by robbing the Medicare and Social Security trust funds. America's seniors, who still lack a drug benefit, are fronting the costs so that rich Americans can avoid taxes on their estates. There should be no mistake about this Administration's priorities.

The President's Medicare reform goal is clear: he wants to alter the program so that government saves money and beneficiaries pay more. He's using the lure of an inadequate prescription drug benefit to steer seniors down that road, but I don't think they're going to buy it.

Republicans would like nothing better than to turn Medicare into a welfare program. I'm happy to see Medicaid getting \$77 billion, but I don't want that to jeopardize our commitment to providing drug coverage for all seniors. By the President's own estimation, his low-income proposal will help just three million seniors. And what does he offer the other 37 million seniors who want a prescription drug benefit? A bogus, laughable drug discount card that won't save them any money.

What America's seniors expect, need and deserve is a real Medicare prescription drug benefit. Candidate Bush promised this on the campaign trail. Now President Bush should fulfill that pledge.